

# Of Longings and Loves

## *Seven Poems by Theodore Prodromos*

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Ten days before the end of my summer fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks in 2010, I reread Alexander Kazhdan's "Theodore Prodromos: A Reappraisal" in order to verify his revised dates for Prodromos's life and death, somewhere between the years 1100 and 1180.<sup>1</sup> Did they stand up to subsequent criticism? Having checked dates, I was struck by the allusion—with barest paraphrase—to seven short poems, forty-six lines in all, attributed to Theodore Prodromos. Kazhdan described them as "the only examples of personal poetic feeling in Byzantium." First published by Emile Legrand in 1891 I knew of them but had never studied them. I raced down to find them and was instantly bewitched: what were these poems, and whence their power?

With the exception of Legrand and Kazhdan, when these poems have been mentioned they have been dismissed as late, popular love poems in the folk style, unlikely to be by Theodore Prodromos. Leaving aside the question of authorship for the moment, there exists to my knowledge no analysis of any kind, whether metrical, linguistic, literary, or comparative. I dedicate this appraisal of the poems<sup>2</sup> (edited and translated on

pp. 210–11) to the memory of Alexander Kazhdan, and to Dumbarton Oaks.

Of their highly wrought craftsmanship, there can be no doubt. "Something between *rebetika* and Cavafy" was one scholar's reaction—echoing my own—perhaps because of their bitter, songlike quality, suppressed eroticism and indeterminacy of speakers. "Catullus?" was another's. To my mind came also poems of John Donne and Thomas Hardy for anguished questionings of self and God, often expressed in abstruse vocabulary and difficult syntax.<sup>3</sup> To my ears came lieder from Schubert's "Winterreise," especially in poem 7 for the tension between pain and relief, and for the physical sense of utter exhaustion of traveling on strangers' legs (ποδάρια ξένα). They are neither love nor folk poems, although the author was aware of formulas, themes, and motifs current in the popular tradition. There is no love object, no beloved persona, only a series of dramatic exchanges between the poet and his passions (πόθοι καὶ ἔρωτες), the poet and his soul (ψυχή), and their responses, closing with a general statement. In the course of the seven poems, the poet joins battle with bits of himself: body and soul, longings and loves, hands and legs, greedy lion, exhausted traveler; not lovesick,

1 A. P. Kazhdan and S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1984), 87–114, esp. 111; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180)* (Cambridge, 1993), 440 and n. 73.

2 E. Legrand, "Poésies inédites de Theodore Prodromos, publiées d'après la copie de l'Alphonse l'Athenien," *REG* 4 (1891): 70–73.

3 See, for example, from Donne's *Divine Meditations*, no. 14, "Batter my heart, three-personed God . . .," *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (London, 1996), 314–15; from Hardy's *Wessex Poems*, "I look into my glass," and, from *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, "Survivor," *Collected Poems* (London, 1923), 72, 660–61.

## The Poems

Θεοδώρου τοῦ Προδρόμου

1

Πόθοι μου, πόθοι πόθοι μου, ἔρωτες ἔρωτές μου,  
 μικροὺς σᾶς ἐπαρέλαβα καὶ ἀγούρους σας ἐποίησα,  
 καὶ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν μου ἠύξήθητε καὶ ἐγένεσθε  
 μεγάλοι·  
 καὶ ἐδάρτε ὅταν ἠνδρώθητε καὶ ἤλπιζα  
 εὐχαριστίαν,  
 5 μάλιστα δαπανᾶτε με καὶ κατατέμνετέ με.  
 Οὐκ οἶδα ἀχαριστότερον εἰς τὸν παρόντα βίον.

2

Ἀντέταξες, ἐλήστευσες, ἔκυψες,  
 ἔπιες αἷμαν·  
 εἰπέ μας τί ἀπεκέρδησας, εἰ μὴ τὸ κρῖμαν μόνον;

3

Ναὶ πάταξε τὸν διάβολον καὶ πίασε εἰπέ τὸν στίχον·  
 ναὶ καὶ κατασταυρώθητι, ναὶ πτύσε εἰς τὰ  
 ζουγλά σου·  
 ναὶ εἰπέ ἄς σὲ ποίσουσιν εὐχήν, ναὶ μὴ σὲ φάγη  
 τὸ πείσμαν·  
 εἰπὲς οὐκ ἔν καὶ ἀπάρτι οὐκ ἔν, καὶ οὐ  
 μεταστρέφει ὁ λόγος·  
 5 εἰπέ τὸ ἄς ἔν καὶ νὰ ἔν τὸ ἄς ἔν, καὶ μὴ σκιρτήσῃ  
 ὁ δαίμων.

4

Ἀφῆτε με, ἐξαφῆτε με, τώρα ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐρράγη·  
 εἶπα τὴν, καὶ ἀπεστράφη με καὶ ὀργῆς  
 ἰχάδιν ἔχει·  
 τί ἔνι τὸ φονικοῖχάδιν σου, φονεύτρα, νὰ  
 μὲ πλήξῃς;—  
 Εἶπες το καὶ ἐξαναεἶπες το, κἂν θέλεις πάλιν εἰπέ το·  
 5 ἂν οὐκ ἐλεῆς τὸ στόμαν σου, λάλει καὶ πάλιν λάλει·  
 δωρεὰν ὀχλείσαι, νεώτερε, μετ' ἄλλων  
 ὅρκους ἔχω.—  
 Καὶ οἱ ὅρκοι παραβαίνονται καὶ οἱ λόγοι  
 μεταστρέφουν,  
 καὶ ἀγάπαι μετατίθενται πρὸς τούτους ἐξ ἐκείνων·  
 τέως δὲ τοὺς ὅρκους τοῦ ἔρωτος μὴδὲ  
 προβάλλεσαι τους,  
 10 ἐρώτησε καὶ νὰ σὲ εἰποῦν οὐκ ἔχουν οἱ ὅρκοι κρῖμαν.

By Theodore Prodromos

1

Longings, longings of mine, loves, my own loves,  
 small I adopted you, warriors I made you,  
 and in my heart you grew many  
 and great:  
 grown now to manhood, when I hoped  
 for thanks  
 5 you can but consume me and cut me to shreds.  
 Nothing more thankless have I known in this life.

2

You rebelled, you robbed, you stooped, you  
 drank blood,  
 tell us what have you gained save only the sin?

3

Yes smite the devil and begin: tell the verse,  
 yes cross yourself hard, spit on  
 your mitts,  
 yes bid them pray for you, lest self-will  
 devour you.  
 Say it's not so, and so be it not, the word does  
 not change;  
 5 say let it be so and so it shall be, else the demon  
 may skip.

4

Leave me, let me be, now my soul is shattered;  
 I spoke to her, she turned from me with shriek  
 of wrath.  
 What is the killer shriek, murderess, you stroke  
 me with?  
 —You said it once, twice, say it again if you like:  
 5 unless you curb your mouth, you'll blab on and on;  
 in vain your anguish, youth, I have others' vows  
 to care for.  
 —Yet vows get broken and words turn  
 around,  
 and affections change place to these from those.  
 Meantime make the vows of love  
 no excuse,  
 10 ask, and they will tell you—vows know no sin.

5

Ἔκτισα πύργον ὀχυρόν, ἐγγόρηγον, τοῦ πόθου,  
καὶ ἔλεγα ὅτι ἐνὶ ἀπρόδοτος, τίς νὰ μὲ τὸν ἐπάρῃ;  
Ἀρτίως θεωρῶ προδίδοται καὶ ὅτι ἀπλικεύουν ξένοι·  
ἀνάθεμά με ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν ἂν ἀνακτίσω πύργον·  
5 καὶ οὐδὲν τζεργῶνω ὡς ἔτυχε, καὶ κατουνεύω  
ὡς εὖρω.

6

Τί λέων ἐφάνης εἰς ἐμὲ καὶ τρώγεις με καθ' ἡμέραν;  
ἂν φάγῃς καὶ πληρώσεις με, ποῦ νὰ εὕρῃς  
ἄλλο βρῶμαν;

7

Ἄν πάθῃ δίψαν ἄνθρωπος μέσα εἰς ἀγριοτοπίαν,  
καὶ οὐκ ἐνὶ πόλιν, οὐδ' ἀγρός, νὰ ἐμβῇ νὰ πῇ  
νὰ ζήσῃ,  
καὶ ψύγουνται τὰ χεῖλη του, ξηραίνεται ὁ  
λαιμός του,  
καὶ ὑπάγῃ ὁ ταπεινούτζικος τελείως καὶ παραδώσῃ·  
5 ἔπειτα ὑπάγῃ παρεκεῖ μετὰ ποδάρια ξένα,  
καὶ εὕρῃ λιβαδερούτζικον καὶ μέσα κρύαν  
βρυσίτζαν,  
καὶ ἐνὶ τὸ νερούτζικον καλὸν καὶ κύψῃ  
καὶ χορτάσῃ,  
καὶ δροσισθῇ ἡ καρδιά του καὶ ἀναζωωθῇ  
ἡ ψυχὴ του,  
καὶ πάλιν πέσῃ ἀνάταυρα, καὶ πάλιν κύψας πῇ,  
10 μέχρ' εἰς τέλος κορεσθῇ καὶ ὑπάγῃ εἰς τὴν ὁδὸν του·  
οὐ πρέπει ἐκεῖνο τὸ νερὸν καὶ ἐκείνην τὴν  
βρυσίτζαν,  
καὶ ἐκεῖνο τὸ λιβαδερόν νὰ τὸ ἀπολησμονήσῃ·  
ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσάκις ἔχει ὁδόν, ἂν  
καὶ παραστρατίζει,  
ἐκεῖ ὑπάγῃ καὶ προσκυνᾷ καὶ ἀπλώνει εἰς τὸ  
λιβάδιν,  
15 καὶ κἂν διψᾷ, κἂν οὐ διψᾷ, νὰ εὐχαριστῇ  
καὶ πίνῃ.

1.2 ἐπήκα 3.3 πήσουσιν 4.1 τόρα 4.2 ἡχάδιν Mackridge 4.3  
φονοηχάδιν Mackridge metri causa 5.1 ἐνέχυρον Holton

5

I built a fortress, firm-cemented, against longing,  
I said it was beyond betrayal—who could take it?  
I see it now betrayed, strangers there encamped;  
curse me from now if I build another fortress,  
5 I'll set up no haphazard camp nor find  
random shelter.

6

Why, lion, have you come to eat me every day?  
If you eat your fill of me, where else will you  
find food?

7

If man should suffer thirst in wilderness,  
no city, no field to enter so as to drink  
and live,  
his lips are parched, his throat  
is dry,  
the wretch goes on, and gives up utterly;  
5 then further still he goes on legs not his own  
to find a meadow, a cool spring  
therein,  
the water is good, he stoops and takes  
his fill,  
his heart is refreshed, his soul  
lives anew,  
again he falls prostrate, again he stoops to drink  
10 until sated at last he goes on his way;  
that water, that spring, and  
that meadow  
it is not proper he should ever forget,  
but as often as he takes the road, though  
he may stray,  
on he goes, kneels down, and lies in  
the meadow,  
15 and, thirst or no thirst, may he give thanks  
and drink.

but racked with self-doubt. Initial thanklessness is balanced by thankfulness at the end, while the inner voices remain diverse but distinctive. Tongue and meter may be “modern” Greek; but the dramaticized yet unspecified speakers, alongside the occasional complexity of syntax and obscure vocabulary, have their closest analogies in the *Greek Anthology*.<sup>4</sup>

The poems are no easier to interpret than those in the *Greek Anthology*, so I shall take each in turn to tease out possible meanings.

### Poem 1

The poet addresses his “longings” and “loves”: *I brought you to life inside me, and you grew in number and size. Now you are grown to manhood, instead of thanks you destroy me.* The motif suggests pregnancy: the formulaic structure is comparable to that found in traditional lullabies, where the mother invokes Hypnos (Sleep) to “take my child small and bring him back full grown,” that is, to set him on a sure path to maturity.<sup>5</sup> Here, the poet adopted (ἐπαρέλαβα) his own past passions only to find they have become warlike youths (ἀγούρους, cf. πολεμιστής, Kriaras s.v.) against him and beyond his expectations, bringing death instead of life. It is a striking variation, predicated on a system within the tradition of lullabies and laments where Hypnos is the gentle counterpart to the violent male agent, Charos (Death);<sup>6</sup> but here the sentiment is individual rather than “folk” in character. As for “longings” and “loves,” they are pejoratively paired in moral and philosophical

tracts from the third century BC, causing violence, rage, fury, and characterized as νόσοι (diseases).<sup>7</sup> The positive motif of the traditional lullaby is turned negative, as if the poet has grown inside himself the seeds of self-destruction, in a monstrous male pregnancy. The final line, standing on its own, reinforces his isolation.

### Poem 2

His longings and loves spell out his crimes—involving violence, possibly murder—bringing no gain, only κρίμα (sentence/judgment, also sin/wrong.)

### Poem 3

Longings and loves now bid him perform upon himself with his own hands the physical acts of penance: cross yourself, say your prayers, spit on your hands! As a noun formed from the adjectival form ζουγλός (lit. “maimed,” Kriaras), ζουγλά (n. pl.) is not attested elsewhere, but compare τὸν ζουγλόν (masc. sg. accus.) in Theodore Prodromos’s *Στίχοι δεητήριον* (the so-called Maiuri poem), line 40, where the sense is probably “juggler.”<sup>8</sup> In both passages, a colloquial term for hands is implied, with the added point that it was these very hands that killed: hands can kill, as well as juggle, play, or pray. One old meaning of πείσμα (πεῖθω) is “ship’s cable,” hence that which holds fast, or must be obeyed, “pertinacity.” In moral contexts it may have negative connotations, “obduracy,” as I take it to be in line 3.<sup>9</sup> Lines 4–5 are

4 Mackridge points out that Poem 7 consists of a single, intricate, fifteen-line conditional sentence, the protasis (1–10) introduced by particle ἄν, with all verbs of action in perfective non-past (aorist subjunctive), and only verbs of state (ψύγουνται, ξηραίνεται) in the imperfective aspect; lines 11–15 constitute the apodosis. However, the line between protasis and apodosis is hard to draw, rendering interpretations even more open. The poems may be read on literal and allegorical levels at the same time. I agree with Mackridge that such syntactical complexity is never to be found in Greek folk poetry. As to meter, he notes the frequency of synizesis, used almost every time two vowel sounds meet, in contrast to the rarity of hiatus (two or three instances). With two exceptions (πήσουσιν and τόρα), I have chosen to preserve the original forms since there is no doubt where synizesis is required when the poems are read aloud, and it is important to respect the ways poets and copyists have chosen to write and sound, rather than to impose our own preconceptions.

5 N. G. Polites, *Ἐκλογαὶ ἀπὸ τὰ τραγούδια τοῦ ἐλληνικοῦ λαοῦ* (Athens, 1914), no. 148.

6 M. Alexiou, *After Antiquity: Language, Myth, and Metaphor* (Ithaca, 2002), 368–69.

7 Chrysippos Phil., *Fragmenta moralia* 394.11–14 (J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, vol. 3 [Leipzig, 1903]): ὀργή καὶ τὰ εἶδη αὐτῆς (θυμὸς καὶ χόλος καὶ μῆνις καὶ κότος καὶ πικρία καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα), ἔρωτες σφοδροὶ καὶ πόθοι καὶ ἡμεροὶ καὶ φιληδονία καὶ φιλοδοξία καὶ τὰ ὅμοια; Timaios Phil., *Fragmenta et titulus*, p. 222, line 11 (H. Thesleff, *The Pythagorean Texts of the Hellenistic Period* [Abo, 1965]): ἐπιθυμία τε καὶ φόβοι, ἐξαμμέναι μὲν ἐκ σώματος, ἀνακεκραμέναι δὲ τῆ ψυχῆ . . . ἔρωτες γὰρ καὶ πόθοι ἡμεροὶ τε ἐκλυτοὶ ὀργαί τε σύντονοι καὶ θυμοὶ βαρεῖς ἐπιθυμία τε ποικίλαι καὶ ἄδοναι ἄμετροι ἐντί. In later religious texts, including saints’ lives, πόθοι, without ἔρωτες, may act as destructive incendiary agents (TLG).

8 A. Maiuri, ed., “Una nuova poesia di Teodoro Prodromo in Greco volgare,” *BZ* 23 (1914–18): 397–407, line 40. E. Kriaras, *Λεξικὸ δημώδους ἐλληνικῆς γραμματείας γλώσσας* (Thessalonike, 1980), ἀνάπηρος, deriving the adjective from ζάγκλον—ζαγκλόν. Mackridge compares colloquial use of MG κουλό, as in κάτω τὰ κουλά σου ἀπὸ πάνω μου, G. Babinot, *Λεξικὸ τῆς νέας ἐλληνικῆς γλώσσας* (Athens, 1998), s.v.

9 Clem. Alex., *Stromata* 2.20.113–14: τοῦ κατηγορῶν γράφει κατὰ λέξιν. “ἐὰν γὰρ τινι πείσμα δῶς, ὅτι μὴ ἔστιν ἡ ψυχὴ μονομερής, τῇ δὲ τῶν προαρτημάτων βία τὰ τῶν χειρῶν γίνεται πάθη, πρόφασιν οὐ τυχοῦσαν ἔξουσιν οἱ μοχθηροὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων λέγειν· <ἐβιάσθην,

hard to understand, but there is a plausible performative sense for the verb “to be” to demonstrate the power of words (as in God’s sentence “let there be light”): say “it isn’t” (sc. *that you didn’t kill?*), then it is not; say “it may be so,” then so be it (sc. *that you did kill?*)—else the demon may skip. In other words, his uncertainty (guilty or not guilty?) is an open invitation to the devil. In its general tone, the poem recalls the injunctions in the monastic *typika* to counter the temptations of the flesh with exercises, physical and spiritual.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, its verbal pattern of statement-counterstatement is matched in the *Greek Anthology* (Meleager 5.184), and in another poem by Theodore Prodromos to be cited and discussed below (pp. 219–21).

#### Poem 4

This is the most difficult poem, partly because of several obscure words, but also because the change of speakers is determinable only by the red dots in the manuscript, according to Legrand (see pp. 223–24 below). In reply to their taunts, the poet tells his longings and loves to go away, leaving him to his now-shattered soul. His soul turns away from him with wrathful battlecry, at which he accosts her as φονεύτρα (“murderess”), striking him with killer rage and battlecry. The word *ixádiv* is found in Constantine Porphyrogenetos’s *De cerimoniis*, where it is used alongside *Nanáia*, *Naná*, *Ánaná*, *Ágia*, seemingly as a battlecry for imperial Christian victory.<sup>11</sup> The compound form φονικοηγάδιν (line 3) makes the line hypermetric, but rather than emend to φονοῖηγάδιν (Mackridge), I prefer to keep the *hapax legomenon*, coined to emphasize this particular soul’s murderous nature, with effective double play on φόνος–φωνή to

match *ixádiv*–*hixádiv*.<sup>12</sup> In lines 4–5 she seems annoyed by his dithering: *go on like this if you must, but you’re wasting your time because I have vows with other people to take care of*. His reply (lines 7–10) seems to be: *yes, vows do get broken, words forsworn, affections (ἀγάπαι) change; but the vows of love (ἔρωτος) should not be betrayed, because in themselves, vows know no wrong*. The precise meaning is perhaps intentionally veiled, but a broken oath of love may be surmised. Has the poet fought and won the battle with his own soul (ψυχορραγία, 3.4), hereafter silenced?

#### Poem 5

For the first time, the poet speaks in a single voice throughout, as if his divided inner selves were now exorcised. But his confidence that the fortress against longing he has constructed is impregnable proves misplaced: at this moment (ἀρτίως) it is being betrayed, settled by strangers (ξένοι). The fortress is described as ἐγχόρηγον (“well cemented”), a Byzantine technical adjective rare in literature but used in military and foundation documents, which David Holton has suggested to me might be emended to the more literary ἐνέχυρον (“guaranteed”). However, in an anonymous *Vita* of Saint Athanasios the Athonite (eleventh century), the irrigation system is described as passing through pipes ἐν πύργῳ ἐγχορήγῳ (section 25, line 42), and the *lectio difficilior* confirms the authenticity and originality of poetic voice, and accords with the military terms of poem 4. Also military is the verb τζεργώνω (line 5), probably a foreign loan word, not found in any Greek dictionary, and unknown to Byzantinists consulted so far, but presumably synonymous with κατουνεύω (“set up camp”).

What is this fortress? Not the “castle of love” familiar from the late Byzantine romances, but a space in which to dig in, or immure, feelings (πόθοι καὶ ἔρωτες)—like rushing water in an aqueduct—so they cannot escape, somewhat akin to Heinrich Heine’s *Totensarg* in the last song of his *Buch der Lieder*, “Die alten bösen Lieder . . .,” the coffin in which the poet

ἀπηνέχθη, ἄκων ἔδρασα, μὴ βουλόμενος ἐνήργησα, > τῆς τῶν κακῶν ἐπιθυμίας αὐτοὶ ἡγησάμενοι καὶ οὐ μαχεσάμενοι ταῖς τῶν προσαρτημάτων βίαις.” L. Früchtel, O. Stählin, and U. Treu, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, vol. 2 (3rd ed.), GCS 52 (15) (Berlin, 1960).

10 Robert Jordan notes that the *typikon* of the Phoberou monastery (ca. 1118) follows closely that of Evergetis, especially regarding fasting, and warns stringently of the dangers of homosexual attraction, with awesome examples of wet dreams and female donkeys, “Evergetis, Children and Grandchildren,” in *The Theotokos Evergetis and Eleventh-Century Monasticism*, ed. M. Mullett and A. Kirby, Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations 6.1 (1994), 224–25.

11 Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De cerimoniis aulae Byzantinae* (A. Vogt, *Le livre des cérémonies* [1935–39; repr. Paris, 1967]), 2:91, line 21 (*ixádiv*); 2:125, line 8; 2:128, line 24 (*ixádiv*); 2:130, lines 6 and 18. It is related here to its phonetic equivalent *hixádiv* “caress,” see Babiniotis, s.v. see above, n. 8.

12 The nearest word I can trace is the Aeschylean *hapax* ἱχαρ φρενὶ τ’ ἄταν, *Supplices* 850 (“vehement desire”), glossed as ἐπιθυμίαν in the *Scholia in Aeschylum* (scholia vetera), ad loc. The verb forms *ixanáō*, *ixáinō*, *ixhanáō* are more widely attested until the twelfth century, but almost entirely in lexicographical sources, except for the Sicilian town “Ichana,” so named because it was the object of desire for its captors, from *ixánō*: *ixanān* δὲ τὸ ἐπιθυμεῖν, Aelius Herod., *Περὶ ὁρθογραφίας* (A. Lentz, *Grammatici Graeci*, vol. 3.2 [1870, repr. Hildesheim, 1965]), 3:527, line 28.



can seal in and bury the weight of his love and sorrow, immortally set to music by Robert Schumann in his *Liederkreis* (*Dichterliebe*). Feelings, like water, are hard to contain. To this day, we use the expression “wall-in” our feelings. My literary comparisons across centuries and languages are validated by the forms and themes of the *Greek Anthology*, collections of verse epigrams ever re-created from the third century BCE until the fifteenth century CE, which to this day continue to inspire poets, Greek and others, across the world.<sup>13</sup>

### Poem 6

Enter lion (his cruel past?), who comes every day to eat him. Not without humor, he asks lion where he will go next for food when he is eaten up. Exit lion.

### Poem 7

This last and longest poem speaks generally, in one continuous and uninterrupted sentence, full of indeterminate moods, which definitively rules out “folksong.” The subject is neither soul nor body, but *ἄνθρωπος*, the mode hypothetical and indefinite, not individual: “human-kind,” ungendered, who must will his way onward and upward despite extreme exhaustion, as in Schubert’s “Winterreise” (*Das Wirtshaus*). Only thus can he recover enough strength to find the path that reaches the cool, fresh water of the meadow. Is this paradise, or renewal here on earth? Once seen and tasted, such meadow and water must never be forgotten, but kept in mind and eternally tasted, a gift to be thankful for, *even if it means deviating from the straight and narrow path in our present life*.

From the thanklessness (*ἀχαριστότερον*) of 1.6 to the thankfulness (*εὐχαριστή*) of 7.15, the poet’s outlook is transformed, while the rules of abstinence imposed by the *typika* are implicitly called into question. The closing lines recall the rich man’s words in the biblical parable, with pagan echoes of sensual pleasure:

ψυχὴ, ἔχεις πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ κείμενα εἰς ἔτη πολλὰ καὶ  
ἐρῶ τῇ ψυχῇ μου· ἀναπαύου, φάγε, πίε, εὐφραίνου.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry (Luke 12:19; King James translation).

13 See Al. Cameron, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford, 1993).

In our poem the topos suggests not the overindulgence of the rich man but relief after prolonged deprivation and mortification, implicitly on this earth, and somewhere between life and death. Is there not also a suggestion that extreme suffering and privation might bring creative release, even before and without death, as in Schubert’s *Der Leiermann*?

## Parallels and Precedents

### Genre and Gender

I have tried to convey the sense of these poems at a general level; but their precise meanings and tones of voice remain elusive. Neither didactic nor moralizing, they make no judgment on penitence/abstinence, crime/punishment. There is anguish (1, 4), anger (2, 3, 4), conflict (1–4), resignation (5), humor (6), and finally, sublimation (7). Conflicting emotions are personified and allowed to speak for themselves, not condemned according to a single truth.

Fuller comparison of these poems with Byzantine love lyrics lies beyond my present scope, especially since my readings suggest no single genre or source, other than familiarity with the *Greek Anthology*, where darker dimensions of *pothos* and Eros are dramatized, sometimes with gender ambivalence (as with C. P. Cavafy), although the gender of a pronoun occasionally betrays an all-male encounter, or a threesome.<sup>14</sup> In the prose and verse romances of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries (including Theodore Prodromos’s own *Drosilla and Charikles*), love lyrics are often embedded in letters, laments, and songs, or reported by another, rather than uttered face-to-face between lover and beloved. In the anonymously transmitted vernacular romance *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe* love is portrayed as almost invariably tinged with lament, although the voice is more lyrical than dramatic.<sup>15</sup> *Lyvistros and Rhodamne* (thirteenth century, also anonymously transmitted) has

14 See, for example, book 5, 13.7 πόθους ὀργῶντας, 22.1–2 ἔρωος . . . πόθον, 100.4 μαλερών . . . πόθον. For multiple vocalicity expressed through imagined dramatic dialogue, statement and counter-statement, see 101, 113, 184, as in our Poems 1–4, *The Greek Anthology*, W. R. Paton (London, 1927), vol. 1.

15 Praise of Chrysorrhoe’s beauty, 808–20; love seemingly lost lamented by both lovers, 1752–58; erotic fulfillment compared with tree cultivation, 1959–62, *Le roman de Callimaque et de Chrysorrhoe*, ed. M. Pichard (Paris, 1956).

two pairs of lovers, who relate each other's misfortunes in constant exchange of love songs, laments, letters, and tokens.<sup>16</sup> Love and fate, exile and death are debated from differing points of view in shared experiences of one to another in an attempt to sublimate the qualities of love. Here is Kleitovon's lament (μοιρολόγιν), uttered in response to Lyvistros's tale of woe (lines 3946–56):

Ἄγουρος μυριόθλιβος, ξένος ἐκ τὰ δικά του,  
τὸν ἐκατεβασάνισεν κόρης ὠραίας ἀγάπη  
καὶ ἔφυγεν ἐκ τὴν χώραν του καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ γόνικά του  
καὶ εἰς ξένον κόσμον καὶ οὐρανὸν  
αἰχμάλωτος διαβαίνει,  
πόνους του ἡγείται τὰ δέντρα, θλίψεις τὰς λειβαδίας,  
καὶ ποταμούς τὰ δάκρυά του, βουνὰ τοὺς  
στεναγμούς του·  
ἀηδόνιν εἰς τὴν στράταν του νὰ κιλαδῇ ἂν ἀκούσῃ,  
οἱ κτύποι τῆς καρδίας του καὶ οἱ  
βροντοστεναγμοὶ του  
σιγίζουν τον νὰ μὴ λαλῇ, καρδιοφωνοκρατοῦσιν.  
Ἦδε στρατιώτου συμφορὰ τὴν πᾶσχει διὰ  
φουδούλαν,  
οὕτως ἐν αἰχμάλωτος, ξένος εἰς ἄγριον τόπον.

A warrior with woes manifold, estranged from  
his own [home],  
was sorely stricken for a fair girl's love,  
and fled from his homeland and from his parents,  
living as a captive in a strange world and sky.  
He tells the trees his woes, the meadows his griefs,  
the rivers his tears, the mountains his  
lamentations.  
Should he hear a nightingale sing on his way forth,  
his heartbeats and his thunderous groans  
stop him from speaking, his heart from crying out.  
Behold the soldier's plight for a fair girl's sake,  
how he is a captive, a stranger in a wild place.

This is less a love song than a noble soldier's complaint for cruel exile in a wild foreign land, and recalls the short laments for exile not infrequently found in medieval

16 Ed. P. A. Agapitos, *Ἀρήγησις Λιβίστρου καὶ Ροδάμνης, Κριτική ἔκδοσις τῆς διασκευῆς α*, Βυζαντινὴ καὶ Νεοελληνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη 9 (Athens, 2006). In his introduction (pp. 43–44), Agapitos notes that Cavafy cites N. G. Politis's comparison of lines a' 3946–56 to a folk song with a favorable comment on the literary value of the romance as a whole, K. P. Kavafes, *Τὰ πεζὰ (1882–1931)*, ed. M. Pieres (Athens, 2003), 124.

manuscripts, written into empty spaces by lonely monks far from home. C. P. Cavafy noted the poetic qualities of the passage and of the romance as a whole, which can be read as a meditation on the nature of Eros, life and death, no less rich in meaningful ancient allusions than the learned novels of the twelfth century. With Kleitovon's lament, Prodnomos's seventh poem shares the pervasive melancholy of the theme "stranger in strange lands" (ξένος/ξενιτεία, as in the Euripidean phrase ἐν ξένῳ ξένον). There are also parallels to our thirsty traveler, but the syntax is simpler, the sense specific.

Outside the romances, there are five remarkable poems, preserved in a manuscript of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, which deserve more attention than I can offer here.<sup>17</sup> All five are original, not excerpted or translated from Byzantine or classical literature. In fifteen-syllable verse and fairly stiff Byzantine *koine*, they are of unequal length (as are Theodore Prodnomos's seven), four quatrains and one six-line stanza. Except for the final phrase in poem III, there is no clue as to the identity or gender of either speaker or addressee. In poem I, the speaker complains that either Eros, or his/her lover acts like a hangman (δήμιος): the outcome could have proved otherwise, with a different judge—or, by implication, a different lover?

Βαρύς μοι δήμιός ἐστι, πικρῶς με κατακίζων,  
ὁ δικαστής, ὁ σύνδικος λαμβάνων τὰς εὐθύνας.  
Ἄλλ' ἔστιν ἄλλος δικαστής ὁ τὰς ἐφέσεις ἔχων,  
οὗ παῖς τυγχάνει Ἠλεός, ᾧ Θέμις παρεδρεύει.

Heavy indeed is my hangman, inflicting bitter  
wounds upon me,  
the judge, the advocate holding up chastisements.  
Yet there is another judge who holds appeals,  
his son is Mercy on whom Themis waits.

Poem II (six lines) is seemingly addressed to the poet's lover, whose house has been set up for a tryst: chamber and threshold are still clean, the lamp I lit still burns, why then your great wrath at the garment laid out for payment? We may surmise that the speaker has paid an earlier visit to the lover's chamber, and, finding it

17 A. Tselikas, "Πέντε ἀνέκδοτα βυζαντινὰ ἐρωτικὰ ποιήματα," *Θησαυρίσματα* 12 (1975): 148–54. The poems are on paper, with 313 leaves containing Hermogenes' *Rhetoric*, and the beginning of Aristotle's *Categories*.

empty, left a lamp and a garment as token payment, lingering nearby to await admittance.

Οἶκός σοι πᾶς εἰσιτητός καὶ θάλαμος τυγχάνει.  
 Ἰθὶ λοιπόν, κατάρμαθε εἴ τινος ἵχνη βλέπεις,  
 εἴ τις εἰσῆλθε παρὰ σέ ἢ θύραν γοῦν ἐπῆρε.  
 Πάντα σοι μένει καθαρά καὶ θάλαμος καὶ θύρα,  
 αἶθει καὶ τὸ λαμπάδιον, ὅπερ ἀνήψα σ' ἐνδον  
 ἢ τῆς ἐσθῆτος ἀμοιβή, τί μέγα πρὸς ὀργήν σοι;

Wide open to access is your whole house and  
 chamber.  
 Go then, look closely, see if you find traces  
 of anyone,  
 if anyone came in to you, or opened up the door.  
 All remains clean for you, the chamber and the  
 threshold,  
 the lamp is still burning that I lit for you inside.  
 A garment in payment—what great wrath to you?

There are liturgical undertones to poem III, where the lover, in the first person, calls upon the beloved “true light” and “hope still sweet” as upon Christ, yet I deem life a torment unless I behold *you* (male) again sweetly gazing at me.

Εἰπέ μοι, φῶς ἀληθινόν, ἐλπίς ἔτι γλυκεῖα,  
 τί δεῖ ποιεῖν, τίς μηχανή, πῶς ἤξω πρὸς σε πάλιν,  
 ὥς ἔγωγε ὅπερ νῦν ζῶ βάσανον εἶναι κρίνω,  
 ἦν μὴ καὶ πάλιν ἴδω σε γλυκὺ προσβλέποντά μοι.

Tell me, true light, hope ever sweet,  
 What must I do, what contrivance (find), how  
 come to you again?  
 For me I deem my present life a torment  
 If I do not see you once more sweetly gaze  
 upon me!

The addressee here must be a man, even though the context suggests a woman. True, the masculine singular accusative form of the participle was extended to the feminine in hymns and prose histories, as in Romanos the Melodist;<sup>18</sup> but the position of the phrase at the end

18 See K. Mitsakis, *The Language of Romanos the Melodist* (Munich, 1967), 158–59, section 306, and further comments in Alexiou, *After Antiquity: Greek Language, Myth and Metaphor* (Ithaca, NY, 2002), 68 and 485, n. 4.

of the poem foregrounds it in such a way as to leave no question of carelessness. Rather, liturgical precedent of masculine for feminine participial form gives the poet the license to address the beloved as quasi-divine.

The fourth poem, a quatrain, begs for entry that very night. The beasts referred to may be real or figurative, or perhaps suggestive of both.

Τὴν μὲν ὁδὸν οὐκ ἀγνοῶ, δέδοικα δὲ τοὺς θῆρας  
 οὓς εἶναί σοι πρὸ τῆς ὁδοῦ, ὅπως ἔἴς οὐκ οἶδα.  
 Ἄλλ' ἀνελε τὸ κώλημα, οἶκτον νῦν γοῦν λαβών μου,  
 καὶ δὸς ἐλθεῖν αὐθις πρὸς σε πρὶν ἐπελθεῖν  
 τὴν νύκτα.

I am not unfamiliar with the way, yet I fear  
 the beasts  
 that are in front of your road, I know not how  
 you let them.  
 Just take away the hindrance, show pity on me,  
 and grant me to come at once to you before  
 night falls.

In the fifth and final poem, there is a single question: whence comes such desire you possess in your eyes?

Τίς ὁ τοιοῦτος ἡμερος, τίς ἢ τοσαύτη χάρις,  
 ἣν ἔχεις ἐν τοῖς ὄμμασιν, ἢ τοὺς ὁρώντας θέλγεις;  
 οὐδεὶς εὐθὺς οὐ γέγονε Βάκχος ἰδὼν σε μόνον·  
 εἶλε καὶ λίθους ἥδη σου τὸ ἡμερόεν ὄμμα.

What such longing as this, what such great thrill  
 do you possess in your eyes to bewitch your  
 beholders?  
 None has not turned into Bacchos at once just to  
 behold you:  
 your eye of desire has already lifted up stones.

These poems are variations (homoerotic?) on the *paraklausithyron*, where the lover, barred and bolted from his mistress's house, begs for entry, a theme familiar from the Anthology as well as from Hellenistic and late antique mimes, which, as we know from letters, enjoyed a resurgence of popularity from the twelfth century.<sup>19</sup> Similarities between the laments in the romances, the six love poems, and Theodore Prodromos's seven

19 See sources cited in my “Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochoprodromic Poems,” *DOP* 53 (1999): 108.



include taut dramatic structure, ambivalence of speaker, gender, and genre, and the theme of ξένος, ξενιτειά (“stranger,” “strange lands”). If the love poems express more than an individual’s sexual yearning and they strive toward a spirituality and philosophy of Eros, making the beloved an object of worship, Prodrōmos seems to seek no less than human redemption and fulfillment in this our present life.

### *Body and Soul*

I shall turn now to body/soul poetry, a genre common during the medieval period in Byzantine east and Latin west alike, preserved in monastic sources (as here), and composed in registers ranging from moderately archaizing to vernacular. The genre continued to flourish in post-Byzantine literature, as in Leonardos Dellaportas’s *Memorandum for His Soul* (Λόγος τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ Λεονάρδου Ντελλαπόρτα περὶ ἀνταποδόσεως καὶ ὑπομνηστικὸν περὶ τῆς ἑαυτῆς ψυχῆς), to take a Cretan example from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century.<sup>20</sup> It is a versification of a prose text attributed to Ephrem, comprising 168 lines of lamentation addressed to the soul, with dire warnings of the consequences of sin and sensuality. After lengthy recrimination, the soul replies (101–51), expressing remorse and uttering shrieks of lamentation (149–51): she has angered God by her sinfulness, especially for overindulgence of the senses, for bliss can be sought and found only in Paradise, not in this world, as in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (123–32). The poem ends with an exchange in direct speech in which the poet bids his soul repent forthwith; the Lord’s words of pardon are uttered aloud (151–59); and the grace of divine mercy is affirmed (160–69). In addition to the use of vernacular fifteen-syllable verse, common to both Dellaportas and Prodrōmos are: contention between self and soul, who speaks in her own voice; allusion to the Dives and Lazarus parable; violence at the crucial instant in a kind of ψυχορραγία (“soul-rupturing”). Both texts resemble lamentations, and contemplations upon death.

Despite common features, there are differences in tone, style, and meaning: where Dellaportas is prolix, didactic, and judgmental, our seven poems are elliptical,

elusive, playful. Precedents in the work of Theodore Prodrōmos can be found in several poems of undisputed authorship which take the form of dialogues, where the poet addresses either a part of himself or a personified entity. Unlike his ceremonial poems, these addresses are personal if not autobiographical, with tragicomic touches, and above all dramatic, whatever their linguistic register. First, two poems addressed to Νοῦσος (“Disease”) in heroic hexameters, from Wolfram Hörandner’s *Historische Gedichte*, nos. 67 and 68. I have already translated in part and discussed poem 68: Disease has left her victim neither dead nor alive, but suspended between the two in perpetual torments. From 67, Maria Bazzani has illustrated the power of three extended similes to express the exact nature of the poet’s torments.<sup>21</sup>

- 25 Τίπτε με λευγαλέησι δαμάζειαι ἀμφ’ ὀδύνῃσιν  
αἰὲν ἀπ’ ἐκ μελέων βαλέειν μεμαυῖα  
ὥς δ’ ὅτ’ ἀνὴρ πολὺπον μετὰ χεῖρασι ταριχοπώλης  
ζῶν ἐλὼν παίησι, μένος δὲ δάπτει  
τύμμασι’ ἀεικελίοισιν, ἀτὰρ ταρῖχενσε δαμάξας,  
30 ὥς καὶ ἐμόν συ μένος δαμάζειαι ἄλγεσι μακροῖς  
ἐς θανάτοιο τάριχον ἐεδομένη τάχα πέμψαι.  
ὥς δ’ ὅτε χαλκοπόνος βροτὸς Ἡφαίστοιο πάρεδρος  
ὀλκὸν ἐλκὸν ἐλὼν μετὰ χέρσιν ἀμειδήτοιο σιδήρου  
πὰρ πυρί τ’ ἐξομάλαξε καὶ ἐς μέτρον ἤγαγε πειθοῦς,  
35 αὐτὰρ ἐνὶ σφύρηφι βαρειάων ἀπὸ χειρῶν  
παίει, ὃ δ’ αὐτ’ ἀέκοντι θυμῷ φορέῃσιν ἀνάγκην,  
ὥς καὶ ἐμὲ τρισάποτμον οἰζύες αἰσὺλα ῥέξαν.  
ὥς δ’ ὅποτε σφαίραν περὶ μειράκια κροτέονται,  
τῇ καὶ τῇ στροφώσιν ἀμοιβὰδὶς ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος,  
40 ἢ δ’ ὑπὸ παιγμοσύνῃ μεπκίδναται ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα,  
οὐ μέν πω θελεύθουσα, βίην δ’ ἀπέχουσ’ ὑπαλύξαι,  
ὥς καὶ ἐγὼ κακότητι κυλίνδομαι ἀτρυγέτοισι.

Why do you subdue me with pitiful pains,  
always eager to hurl my soul away from my  
body? As when a fisherman takes a living  
octopus in his hands, beats it, and wears its vigor  
out with shameful strikes; and then, once he  
has killed it, he puts the fish under salt, likewise,

20 M. I. Manousakas, ed., *EEBS* 39–40 (1972–73), 67–72. For Byzantine references, see H.-G. Beck, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Volksliteratur* (München, 1971), 186–92. Medieval Latin (and European vernacular) examples are given by P. Dronke, *Verse with Prose: from Petronius to Dante* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 47–52, 127 n. 64.

21 Poem 68: Alexiou, “Ploys of Performance,” 106. Poem 67: Bazzani, “Theodoros Prodrōmos’ Poem LXVII,” *BZ* 100, no. 1 (2007): 1–12. In the second section, I have made three minor changes in the translation. For a humorously bitter description of his own appearance after suffering from smallpox, see PG 133:1251B–52B.

you exhaust my strength with deep aches, eager to send me embalmed quickly to death.

As when a blacksmith, a companion of Hephaistos, taking in his hands a weight of laughterless iron, softens it near the fire and reduces it to the edge of docility, and then smites it with a mallet, with heavy blows, but again the iron bears that duress with constrained disposition: likewise woes cruelly made me thrice-wretched.

As when boys fight around a ball, and in turn they roll it here and there, from one place to another, and the ball, even though reluctant, goes hither and thither under the constraint of the game, and keeping away avoids the violence, likewise too I am tossed about by unrelenting troubles.

Drawn from concrete details of everyday Constantinopolitan life, these similes have an electrifying effect. In the first, the octopus's painful and prolonged death throes depict the poet's living death at the hands of Nousos. In the second, mythical allusion to Hephaistos's "laughterless iron" enhances rather than detracts from its force, since, as Stephen Halliwell has shown, the epithet *ἀγέλαστος* may denote derangement or mocking scorn, and is appropriate to tragicomic perspectives (*γελαστά/ἀγέλαστα*), as in the adulterous story of Ares and Aphrodite. He notes further that Thersites' downfall at the hands of Hephaistos in *Iliad* book 1 demonstrates the results of "laughter out of place."<sup>22</sup> It also suggests the subversive ambivalence of laughter. The third simile, which is found again in the Ptochoprodromic poems, recalls Gloster's "As flies are to wanton boys, are we to the gods: they kill us for their sport" in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (IV.i). Common to all three, and central throughout Prodromos's work, including our seven poems, is the theme of man hovering, suspended between life and death.

A shorter poem (nineteen lines), also acknowledged as the work of Theodore Prodromos, is entitled "On a depiction of *Bíos*" (*Εἰς εἰκονισμένον τὸν Βίον*), in fifteen-syllable verse and standard Byzantine vernacular: it sketches two antithetical pictures of Life

to illustrate the fragility of the human condition (PG 133:1419–20):<sup>23</sup>

- Ἐμέ, τὸν βίον, ἄνθρωπε, δέξαι σου παραινέτην·  
 ἔτυχες, εὖρες, ἔλαβες, κατέσχεες μου τὰς τρίχας;  
 Μὴ πρὸς ῥαστώνην ἐκδοθῆς, μὴ πρὸς τρυφὴν  
 χωρήσης,  
 μὴ δὲ φρονήσης ὑψηλὰ καὶ πέρα τοῦ μετρίου.  
 5 Γυμνὸν με βλέπεις· νόησον γυμνὸν μου καὶ τὸ τέλος.  
 Ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας μου τροχοί· φρίττε μὴ κυλισθῶσι.  
 Περὶ τὰς κνήμας μου πετερά· φεύγω, παρίπταμαί σε,  
 ζυγὰ κατέχω τῇ χειρὶ· φοβοῦ τὰς μετακλίσεις.  
 —Τί με κρατεῖς; —Σκιὰν κρατεῖς· πνοὴν κρατεῖς  
 ἀνέμου.  
 10 —Τί με κρατεῖς; —Καπνὸν κρατεῖς, ὄνειρον,  
 ἥχνος πλοίου.  
 Ἐμέ, τὸν βίον, ἄνθρωπε, δέξαι σου παραινέτην.  
 Οὐκ ἔτυχες, οὐκ ἔλαβες, οὐκ ἔσχεες μου τὰς τρίχας;  
 Μὴ σκυθρωπάσης τοῦ λοιποῦ, μὴδὲ δυσελπιστήσης.  
 Γυμνὸς εἰμί, καὶ τῶν χειρῶν ἐξολισθήσας τούτων,  
 15 ἴσως μεταρρύησομαι πρὸς σέ καὶ μεταπέσω·  
 ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας μου τροχοί· τάχα σοι κυλισθῶσι.  
 Περὶ τὰς κνήμας μου πετερά· τρέχω,  
 προσίπταμαί σοι.  
 Ζυγὰ κατέχω· τάχα σοι τὴν πλάστιγγα χαλάσω.  
 Μὴ τοίνυν ἀποπροσποιοῦ τὰς ἀγαθὰς ἐλπίδας.

O mortal, receive me, *Bíos*, as your exhorter!  
 Did you attain, did you find, did you obtain,  
 did you seize my hair? Do not give over to idleness,  
 do not retreat to self-indulgence, do not be  
 conceited beyond a moderate degree! [5] You see  
 me naked; bear in mind that my end is naked as  
 well. Wheels beneath my feet. You may shudder  
 if they roll along! Wings around my knees. I  
 flee, I fly away from you. I hold the beam of  
 balance in my hand. Be afraid of [its] volatility!  
 —Why do you hold on to me?  
 —You are holding on to a shadow; you are  
 holding on to a blast of wind.  
 —[10] Why do you hold on to me?  
 —You are holding on to a smoke, a dream,  
 the track of a ship. O mortal one, receive me,  
*Bíos*, as your exhorter. Did not you attain, did

22 S. Halliwell, *Greek Laughter* (Cambridge, 2008), 70–77 (Thersites), 80–81 (Hephaistos and Aphrodite).

23 It is now available as cited here from Nikolaos Zagklas's authoritative book *Theodore Prodromos: The Neglected Poems and Epigrams* (Edition, Translation and Commentary) (Vienna, 2014), 382–84.

not you obtain, did not you seize my hairs?  
Do not look grimly for the remains of life, do  
not lose your hope. I am naked, I slipped away  
from these hands, [15] perhaps I will change  
from one side to the other and verge in favour  
of you. Wheels beneath my feet; I probably roll  
along for you. Wings around my knees; I run,  
I fly towards you. I am holding the balance; I  
probably loosen the scale of balance. Hence, do  
not discard pure hopes.

We are not told which is the true picture, but presented with a series of antithetical moves, each possible but uncertain at the hands of a capricious agent, Life, whose fickle moods are humorously juxtaposed without explanation, yet visualized with concrete details of wings, wheels, scales—and dodgy balances. The hands from which he slithers naked in line 14 seem to be those that cling to him in lines 9–10. Although named Life (Βίος), his attributes are also those of Fortune (the wheel), Eros (the wings), and Charos, or angel of death (the scales). Playfully but seriously, Life implies that it is up to mortal man (Ἄνθρωπος) to decide which picture will come true, reminding us of similar ambivalences in our seven poems.

Next, a twenty-eight-line poem in Homeric language and hexameters, also acknowledged as Theodore Prodromos's work, which begins and ends by denouncing and banishing books, along with learning, rhetoric, orthography and the Muses, entitled Σχετλιαστικοὶ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀτιμίᾳ τοῦ λόγου (PG 133:1419–22):

Ἐρρέτ' ἐμοῦ βιότοιο ἀπόπροθεν, ἔρρετε, βίβλοι.  
Ἐρρε, πρόπαν μελέδημα παλαιγενέων ἀνθρώπων.  
Μηκέτ' ἐμοὶ πελάοις, ἄλλους δέ τε δίξω φῶτας.  
Ἐρρέτ' Ἀριστοτέλους πολυμήχανα δήνεα τέχνης.  
5 Θευλογίη τε Πλάτωνος, ἅπασά τε φιλοσοφίη.  
Ἐμπεδοκλῆος ἄριστα μελήματα, Μοῦσαι Ὀμήρου,  
Μοῦσαι Δημοκρίτοιο, καὶ Ὀρφέος (ὄν τέκε πατήρ  
Ἵταγρος, οὐδ' ἄρα οἱ περὶ ἄσματος ἄλλος ἐρίζοι).  
Οἷχεο, ῥήτροσύνη· ἐξοίχεο, ὀρθογραφίη.  
10 Ἄλλα θ' ὅσα χονοίοισι λόγῳ ἐπὶ κῦδος ὀπάξει,  
Ἐρρετε· ἄλλω ἔοιτε μεληδόνας ἄξια πολλῆς,  
Οὐκ ἐμοί. Ἡ γὰρ ἐγὼ κενεὸν περὶ μόχθον ἀνέτλην,  
Ἵμμεσιν ἐμμογέων· τὸ δ' ἐτώσιος ἐπλετ' οἰζύς,  
Μαψιδίον τε μέλημα, καὶ ἀπάτη ἀφρονέοντων.  
15 Ἐρρετ' ἐμοῦ βιότοιο ἀπόπροθεν, ἔρρετε, βίβλοι.  
Θυμέ, σὺ δ' ἐκ σοφίης μὲν ἀπείργεο, οὐκ ἐθέλων περ-

Μηδ' ἄρ' ἔκητι λόγοιο μέγ' ἄχνησο· μὴ δὲ σὲ λύπη  
Θυμοβόρος κρατεῖτω, ἐναυομένη φίλα γυῖα.  
Ἄλλὰ βίβλων τε, λόγων τε, καὶ ἀτελέος μελεδῶνος,  
20 Τηλοῦ ἀποσκεδάξεν· ἀτὰρ θυμέλῃσι μεθίξεν,  
Καί τε γελωτοπόνοισι παρέξω, καὶ τε μίμοισι,  
Παῖξε δ' ἐν οὐ παικτοῖσι· τὰ γὰρ βροτοὶ ἴσασαν ἄρτι  
Τιμᾶν ἀφρονέοντες· ἅπιστα δὲ θέσαν τὰ λόγοιο.  
Εἰ δ' ἄρα μὴ θυμέλῃσι παρέμμεναι ἔσχες ἐέλδωρ,  
25 Ἦσο σιγῇ ἀκέων, πάτον ἀνθρώπων ἀλεείνων,  
Μηδ' ἀγορῇ μερόπων πωλέσκεο κυδιανείρη,  
Καὶ τάχα δυσβόρους κόσμου προφύγης μελεδῶνας  
Ἐρρέτ' ἐμοῦ βιότοιο ἀπόπροθεν, ἔρρετε, βίβλοι.

Avaunt, far from my life, avaunt, ye books,  
avaunt, each and every care for men of yore,  
come not nigh me, seek out other mortal wights.  
Avaunt, cunning counsels of Aristotle's craft,  
5 Plato's theology too, and all philosophy,  
Empedokles' prime concerns, Homer's Muses,  
Demokritos's too, and Orpheus's (whom his father  
Hyagros begat, none else would vie with  
him in song).  
Begone, speechification. Off with you,  
orthography,  
10 and all else sending mortals to seek glory  
through the word.  
Avaunt: be off, ye careworthies, to someone else,  
not me. Indeed have I sustained hollow toil  
laboring for your sakes; doomed, a wanton wretch,  
a futile fretting, a fraud for fools.  
15 Avaunt, far from my life, avaunt, ye books.  
Heart, shun thou wisdom, yearn not for her,  
nor seek not fondly after word. Let not  
all-consuming  
grief take hold, enkindling thine own limbs.  
Rather, scatter afar thy books, thy words  
20 and boundless cares. Change places for the stage,  
and sit alongside comedies and mimes,  
Play, even with non-players, what men  
always knew  
to honor without heed, deeming words as false.  
But should you not desire to frequent the stage,  
25 keep sweet soft silence, eschew the path of mortals,  
nor traverse the marketplace that boasts to  
bring renown,  
and shun all-consuming worldly cares.  
Avaunt, far from my life, avaunt, ye books.

This poem is a tour de force. Composed in Homeric hexameters, which I have not tried to emulate, it is a pastiche of the most obscure epic forms, formulas, and tags to be found, with one neologism (ρήτροσύνη, formed from ῥήτρα, f. “covenant, law”), a *hapax legomenon*. It is pure burlesque in mock heroic style, as tragicomic in its high style as Ptochoprodromos in his starving scholar’s citations of the butcher’s wife’s “gutter-speak” in poem IV, where the message is the same: learning is wasted labor.<sup>24</sup> There is a double edge to the closing lines: it is better to play, like actors, with what is not playful than to burden oneself with excess learning, with its false promises of glory. Nor is this the only poem where “learning,” and all it entails, is rejected with a certain bitterness beneath the humor. The theme of “playing seriously” is common throughout Prodromos’s works, where language has a key role to play.

### Body, Soul, and Language

We have situated our poems somewhere between love and soul poetry, and established firm links between them and three others indisputably composed by Theodore Prodromos, each in different registers of Greek, or “speech genres.” Unlike Dellaportas, our author does not moralize, but blurs the boundaries between conventionally opposed pairs. What evidence is there elsewhere in Prodromos’s works to suggest that he was concerned with both the theory and praxis of language? It is a large question, but let me conclude by citing pertinent passages from *Περὶ γλώττης* (Letter 7), an important if as yet unstudied letter he wrote to his friend, Alexios Aristenos, *nomophylax* and *orphanotrophos*, because it impinges on the question of authorship, both in the case of our seven poems and “Ptochoprodromos.”

Again, it was Kazhdan who drew attention to the significance of a passage toward the end of this letter, where Prodromos challenges Clement of Alexandria’s view of language as god-given, and situates it firmly in the physical body, which houses the immortal soul, encasing it with clay.<sup>25</sup> Having cited this passage in full, without Kazhdan’s omissions, and discussed its relevance to the Ptochoprodromic poems, I shall now set it in the context of the letter as a whole to suggest its wider importance

for Prodromos’s use of the vernacular. The letter is long, in the usual epistolary style, replete with oblique classical and biblical references. I leave it to others to provide the full text, translation and commentary the letter deserves for its potential contribution to our knowledge of Byzantine aesthetics, and will paraphrase select passages (with Greek cited as relevant) so we can follow key steps in his argument. One difficulty the translator first encounters concerns the word central to the subject itself, “language”: γλώττα (Atticizing form) occurs only four times, once in the title and twice in our key passage; elsewhere, the more normal γλώσσα is used throughout. I can see no contextual reason for this, unless as a Lucianic play on Σ and Τ.<sup>26</sup> Further, the Greek word (both forms) means at the same time “tongue” and “language,” as in the French “langue”: Prodromos infers both meanings throughout to underscore the physicality of human speech, a nuance not available to English.

Prodromos opens with what appear to be the customary clichés of initial hesitation, yet with telling illustrative examples (1258B–60B):

How can I dare to speak in praise of Aristenos’s golden, lofty, and ethereal tongue, I whose own tongue is leaden, humble, and earth-voiced, any more than Thersites should compose an enkōmion for Achilles, or Demophilos offer hymns to Orpheus? Demophilos, whose unmusicality would kill even a night-raven, according to the epigram! (AP 11.186). Better I had kept silence, ox on tongue; but no, differences, even oppositions between myself and Aristenos, must be brought out into the open for proper disputation, so the truth can be revealed, or else I would rightly be turned to stone in shame for having hidden your golden language in silence (τῇ σιγῇ τὴν χρυσὴν σου κατακρύψας γλώσσαν, ὀρφανοτρόφε δικαίως, τοῖς ὀνείδεσι κατακαταπετρωθῶ [sic] 1260A).

Prodromos then makes his first major claim:

Πᾶσα μὲν οὖν ἀνθρωπίνη γλώσσα, τῶν λοιπῶν ἀνθρώπου μορίων τὸ κράτιστόν ἐστι καὶ κορυφαϊότατον· οὐ μόνον ὅτι τῇ δημιουργῷ καλῶς καὶ ὡς ἄριστα διωργάνωται φύσει· οὐδ’ ὅτι

24 D. C. Hesseling and H. Pernot, eds., *Poèmes Prodromiques en grec vulgaire* (Amsterdam, 1910), no. 4, lines 240–47.

25 PG 133:1265A–B; Kazhdan and Franklin, *Studies* (n. 1 above), 111.

26 Lucian, *Δίχην Συμφώνων τοῦ Σίγματος πρὸς τὸ Ταῦ ὑπὸ τοῖς ἐπτά φωνήεσιν*, ed. A. M. Harmon, Loeb I (Cambridge, MA, 1913), 406, §11.



συμμέτρως τοῖς εἴσω καὶ στοιχειώδεσι χυμοῖς  
κέκρται, ἅτε καὶ τῶν ἐκτὸς καὶ τροφίμων οὐσα  
κριτήριον· ἀλλ' ὅτι τοι καὶ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν ὑπηρέτης  
λόγου καθέστηκε, καὶ τῶν τοῦ νοῦς κινήματων  
ἐστὶν ἐξάγγελος

Every human tongue is the strongest and highest of man's constituent parts, not only because it is formed most finely by its creator, nature, nor because it is conveniently mixed from inside with elemental juices, being itself also in charge of food coming in from outside, but indeed because it is established as the servant of reason in us and as a messenger of the mind's movements. (1260A–B)

He goes on to list the unique properties of language in general as mankind's chief gift since ancient times, making possible the foundation of cities, the rule of law, and proper governance. Language facilitated the discovery in different locations of forms of divination (stars, birds, dreams), mathematics, physiology, grammar, philosophy, divine worship, and the means of their diffusion across the then known world, not just Greek (1260B–61A). Turning to his own Byzantine present, he points once more to the paramount position of the tongue (γλώττης) for its service to the soul and central position in divine worship (1261B–62A). Aristenos's language, he claims, stands as far above average human speech as does the latter from that of mute beasts (ἀλόγων ζώων), yet he could only bring himself to call it outright divine, were God to have a tongue—better call it “the pen of a ready writer,” in the words of the Psalmist (1262A). Back to the present, he names Lizix as the emperors' favorite, but directs criticism at his “twittering Atticism” (μετὰ τοῦ ἀττικίζειν ψελλίζουσας), an extreme which Aristenos avoids because he is adept at all styles, as appropriate—Demosthenes, Aristotle, even Lizix himself—without inarticulacy (Δημοσθενίζουσας . . . καὶ Ἀριστοτελίζουσας . . . , καὶ Λιζικευομένην δίχα ψελλότητος), reaching a more divine level (θειοτέρως) than any other human tongue (1261B–62B). In the next section (1262B–64B) he wonders at the world's many and diverse tongues, comparing each people's sounds with the musical instruments they are believed to have discovered: for Etruscans a sweet trumpet (σάλπιγξ), Phrygians a flute (αὐλός), Assyrians a two-stringed instrument (δίχορδον), Milesians the

kithara, and so on (1263A).<sup>27</sup> Impressive as such music may sound, nothing can compare with the tongue of our nomophylax (1263A), as he rises to a climax, foreshadowing his triumphant conclusion (1268A–B) that not even the Muses, nor any other of those fabled voices from the past can compare with Aristenos! Bring all the instruments, he continues: they are as nothing to the natural music of speech (1263A–B). Language at its best can be fast-flowing as a river, midwife to children of the mind. Methymnaios bewitched the dolphin with his kithara, but the instrument alone could not have performed such a feat; rather, with the aid of instruments are the arts produced (Ἀλλὰ σὺν τοῖς ὀργάνοις αἱ τέχναι τὰς ἐαυτῶν ἐνεργείας προβάλλονται 1265A).

This is the point at which he poses his direct challenge to Clement: eloquence and diction *do* matter in language, because language means more than its sense alone. Were it not so, there would be no difference between the cloth-seller and the wise man (1265A–B):

Οὐκ ἐπαινῶ γὰρ ἐγὼ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος τὸν  
Στρωματέα, εὐγλωττίαν μήποτε ζηλοῦν λέγοντα  
μηδὲ ῥημάτων εὐγένειαν, ἀρκεῖσθαι δὲ μόνῳ τῷ  
αἰνίξασθαι τὸ νοούμενον. Ἀδιάφορος γὰρ ἂν οὕτω  
καὶ ὁ βλατοπώλης (sic) εἴη καὶ ὁ σοφός. Ἐγὼ δὲ  
καὶ αὐτὸς μικροῦ ἂν ἢ οὐδὲ τοῦ τυχόντος λόγου  
τὴν γλῶτταν ἤξιωσα, εἰ γυμναῖς ταῖς ψυχαῖς  
διεζῶμεν, τὸν ὁμόζυγον τοῦτον ὑπερναβάντες  
πηλόν. Ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ τοῦ σώματος οὗτος ὁλκός, ὁ  
ὀργανικός, φημί, ἀνδριάς, τὰς ἡμετέρας ψυχὰς  
περιπέπλασται, καὶ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀμέσως τὰ τοῦ νοῦς  
ἡμῖν ἐμφανισθῆναι κινήματα, οὐ δευτέρας οἶμαι  
δεῖν ἀξιοῦν τὴν γλῶσσαν τιμῆς.

I do not praise the part of the *Stromata* that says never to strive for eloquence and nobility of diction but to be satisfied with merely hinting at the sense. For thus there would be no difference between the cloth seller and the wise man. I too would have counted language as of meager or no import if we transcended this clay that is yoked to us and could pass through life with naked souls. But since this burden of the

27 I supply the Greek terms since the instruments cannot always be identified, see N. Malinaras, *Βυζαντινὰ Μουσικὰ Ὀργανὰ* (Athens, 2007), for the most recent study, with 207 illustrations, many from illuminated manuscripts.



body—I refer to this living statue!—has been formed around our souls, and since it is not possible for mental processes to be intimated to us directly, I consider it imperative to rate language as of no secondary importance.

Language is of primary importance because man cannot transcend this clay that is yoked to him (τὸν ὁμόζυγον πηλὸν), and mental processes cannot therefore be intimated to us directly (καὶ οὐκ ἔξδὸν ἀμέσως τὰ τοῦ νοῦς ἡμῖν ἐμφανισθῆναι κινήματα, 1265B). Returning to the nomophylax, he renews his high praise, this time for his rich musicality: it makes thunder without blasting, lightning without burning, although overfilled with atticism (καὶ τῆς ἀττικῆς ὅμως ὑπερπέπλησται μούσης, 1266A). In legal procedures, in scriptural exegesis, in public speaking, and in guarding the laws and defenses of the Empire, the nomophylax is unsurpassed, and stands beside the emperor himself (1267A). In conclusion, he begs grace for his daring to receive such rich channels of praise while bestowing such meager drops of his own, and those too murky and muddy (μικραῖς ἀντιδεξιούσα σταγόσι, καὶ ταύταις θολεραῖς καὶ τελματώδεσιν 1267B). The whole inhabited world will surely join him, in one tongue and in one voice (γλῶσσα μία καὶ χεῖλος ἓν γενομένη), in offering praise and wishes for a long life (1268A).

The letter to Aristenos—the authenticity of which cannot be doubted—is proof, not merely of Prodromos’s extensive knowledge of ancient literature and his facility with scriptural allusion to enrich his theory of language at metaphorical levels (Moses as the burning bush, David as swift pen of God, and so on), but, most consistently and comprehensively, his insistence that language—the tongue—is in and of the body, whose mouth sings in divine worship or composes/performs the finest poetry/song, and at the same time salivates, eats, drinks, and vomits; and, implicitly by another aperture, defecates—a contrast between sublime and filthy so nicely captured in Jonathan Swift’s poem, “The Lady’s Dressing Room.”<sup>28</sup> Fulsome indeed is the praise for the near-divine qualities of Aristenos’s language. But does not the very hyperbole subtly undermine the singleness of truth he seems to acclaim? From his initial departure point, the figure of

Thersites, and the need for disputation, to Lizix and reservations about his “twittering Atticism,” and humorous doubts whether God actually had a tongue (εἰ γλῶσσα ἦν καὶ παρὰ Θεοῦ . . .), until his closing contrast between the near (if never quite!) divine levels of Aristenos’s ambrosia with his own meager, humble drops of murky water, combined as it is with disapproval of hyperatticism, there is a real desire and need for a serious debate on forms of language in the twelfth century. And yet, his enkomia for Aristenos (to whom more letters than to any other person are extant) are at once testimony to his own skill in diverse ancient styles and meters, and brilliant tributes to his friend (PG 133:1241–84).

By extension to Prodromos’s body/soul concept of language, the mouth and other bodily apertures can ingest and excrete noxious substances and matter, especially in the case of physical illness, as is vividly spelled out in all Ptochoprodromic poems. In poem I, Prodromos begins his address to John II by saying that he is suffering from a dread illness—not, he reassures him, σκορδαψός (or χορδαψός) probably “gut-knot,” line 22, an ailment which caused the sufferer to vomit feces from the mouth, but a dreadful wife, whose tongue never stops nagging and abusing him—and by implication the emperor as well. Bodily ailments, especially excreted matter, recur throughout. The so-called Maiuri poem (to be placed third in the sequence as a proem to poem III in my forthcoming edition), is addressed most probably to Manuel I early in his reign: it closes with the complaint that, since he has not received a single small coin after three years of service, he is now reduced to “crow-speak” (κορακιστικόν) and “skimpy pants” (τζίριζουσι τὰ βράκη), indicators of vulgar, abusive speech and poverty respectively.<sup>29</sup> As for poem III, the narrator, now a starving monk, is first made to wash both abbots (unholy, incestuous pair) and ecclesiarch in the same bathtub (32–35, 111–16), later to slaver over the abbots gorging themselves on course after course at “high table” of rich meat and fish (in a manner suggestive of sexual intercourse). Meantime, at “low table” the novice monks get only ἀγιοζούμι/ιοζούμι (holy broth/toxic broth): water boiled with onions in a huge rusty

28 “Disgusted Strephon stole away / Repeating in his amorous fits / Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shifts!,” *Poetry Foundation*, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/180934> (accessed 6 April 2015).

29 Κορακιστικόν: the word is found elsewhere only in John Chrysostom, *In Acta apostolorum*, PG 60:49, line 4: Μὴ κορακιστὶ φθέγγεσθε, ὡ ἀνόητοι, καθάπερ τὰ παῖδια; τζίριζουσιν: no satisfactory solution to date. Du Cange, *s.v.*, suggests τσουρίζειν: circumvolare, “turn up,” i.e., shorten hem.

pot, green with verdigris, big as a baptismal font! What's inside? Implicit and explicit by means of ancient comic allusions are unmentionable excretions from all known apertures as a result of brawls and ball-playing athletes, starring Fat-thug/Big-flesh, Good-lion (Χοντρός, Καλολιόντας), and their gluttonous and sexual excesses.<sup>30</sup> Finally, the starving scholar of poem IV is actually made to eat human feces disguised as tenderloin by the butcher's wife as a punishment for pretentious learning, in terms not unlike those encountered in the high-style poem denouncing learning, letters and books.

There is a coherence between the baser bodily functions and abusive low language, also called "crow-speak" (κορακιστικόν) in the Maiuri poem (line 66) and in the letter to Aristenos (νυκτικόραξ, 1259A), where Nikarchos's epigram is linked with Thersites. The intention is not merely to amuse, but to arouse his imperial patron to anger and so to heal the serious ills of the empire itself. To that end, select use of low vernacular is appropriate, even if, as spoken by the diverse personae of the poems, it is not always consistent. After all, Prodomos's use of archaizing Greek is no more regular, even within his Lucianic play on γλώττα/γλώσσα in his letter to Aristenos on that very topic.

### Closing Comments

I return to our seven poems. At this stage of knowledge of works attributed to Theodore Prodomos, there is no reason to rule either the Ptochoprodromika or our seven poems as "in" or "out"; rather to read them seriously. Inconsistencies and contradictions are bound to occur in so prolific and theatrical a writer, demonstrably proud of his linguistic and stylistic versatility in genre, register, and meter, and as great a word coiner in Byzantine Greek as was Shakespeare for Elizabethan English. Nor are the contradictions in his work merely stylistic and linguistic. Kazhdan has shown how the concept of shifting opposites lies at the very core of his thought, especially on class and social status in twelfth-century Byzantium.<sup>31</sup> He loves to state one truth in one line, only to reverse it in the next, whether it concerns

personal or public life. He acts out, or performs in poetry and drama, conflicting moods and emotions.<sup>32</sup>

The reader cannot but note that our seven poems are in a purer and more consistent form of vernacular Greek than any of the *Ptochoprodromika*. Can they be genuine, especially given the time gap between the twelfth century and the date of the only manuscript (1473), now apparently lost? Hörandner thinks not; Kazhdan and Legrand thought yes. Since Legrand describes the manuscript with great precision, and I am unable to carry out further manuscript research, I will summarize his findings here. First shown to him by Emmanuel Miller, in January 1884 (with permission to copy), it was among the manuscripts Miller collected during travels in the east: a single leaf of thick paper, 22 centimeters tall and 16 wide, from a gilt-edged volume. On the recto are the last lines of the *Vita* of St. Theodore Graptos, ending with the words κρατυνομένου τοῦ Θεοδώρου ("Theodore having been strengthened") above a three-line signature with date (1473); on the verso the seven poems, written in the same hand but finer, with dots in red ink, perhaps punctuation marks. The signature is of one Alphonsos the Athenian, known to have copied parts of two further secular and learned manuscripts (including sections from Aristotle's *Categories*) Parisinus 2161 (Galen) and Harleian 5599 in the British Museum, both with the same signatures. Alphonsos is mentioned in a letter, dated August 1473, from Franciscus Philelphus to his friend Georgios the Athenian, recommending him as a reliable scribe, *cujus vulgaris vernaculaque lingua est certe perpolita ac plane attica*. It is probable that Philelphus himself employed Alphonsos to copy prized items.<sup>33</sup> Further leads might be pursued in the *Vita*, the brothers Graptoi, Theodore and Theophanes, exiled under

32 For an assessment of Prodomos's theatricality, see P. Marciniak, "Byzantine Theatron—A Place for Performance," in *Theatron, Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, ed. M. Grünbart (Berlin and New York, 2007), 279–85.

33 On Alphonsos Doursos (Athenaios), see E. Gamillscheg and D. Harlfinger, *Repertorium der griechischen Kopisten 800–1600* (Vienna, 1981), 1.A:27, no.9: Dominican monk from Athens, pupil of Andronikos Kallistos (see no. 18), connected with Francesco Filelfo and collaborated with Kallistos; still a young man in 1473. For an example of his hand, in addition to vol. 1.C, see D. Harlfinger, *Specimina griechischer Kopisten der Renaissance* (Berlin, 1974), 33. On Filelfo, see N. Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy* (London, 1982), 48–53. The Miller leaf has failed to come to light, although further investigation might show whether it got a catalog no. or shelf mark: there is no mention in *RBSN*, n.s. 8–9 (1971–72), 51–56.

30 Alexiou, "Ploys of Performance," 102–5.

31 Kazhdan and Franklin, *Studies*, 104–11.

the emperor Theophilos (829–42), and possible connections with the Phoberou Monastery, whose surviving *typikon* was compiled by John, the humble monk, at the beginning of October 1113, with intercessions from Saint John the Forerunner (Prodromos).<sup>34</sup> As suggested above (n. 10), the Phoberou *typikon* follows the strictest rules of fasting and of spiritual and physical *askesis* in order to counter the temptations of the flesh. The *Vita* of St. Theodore is precisely the kind of text to stimulate contemplation of body and soul, even to inspire poems, which might then be treasured and passed on by later generations of monks in similar circumstances, finally to be copied by Alphonsos the Athenian with the care described by Legrand.<sup>35</sup> Consummate linguist as he was, I see no reason why Theodore Prodromos could not have composed the seven poems, in a known but private genre, free from prevailing linguistic constraints. Even if the poems were modified between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, the hallmarks of Prodromos's words, rare or never used before, and his inimitable theatricality, remain. Byzantinists, medievalists, and lovers of poetry alike have been captivated by these glimpses of poetic feeling: why should we rule out one of Byzantium's most prolific and versatile creators?

Three points in conclusion. First, Prodromos's experimentation with all registers of Greek, from highest to lowest, is deliberate. The vernacular might be despised, but it had allure, as we know from other contemporary sources, not least because it was vibrant, as can be seen from the female street-sellers' responses to the starving

scholar's suggestive advances, replete with Aristophanic *double-entendres* (Prochoprodromos, poem IV). Second, the vernacular was not a spontaneous expression of unlettered "folk," but crafted in Constantinopolitan circles, alongside the rediscovery of Aristophanic and other ancient dramatic texts. As it gained literary currency during the twelfth century and after, the boundaries between literary genres became more fluid, so that erotic and religious themes, tragic and comic perceptions, were combined in new ways. Third, Prodromos challenges not just the god-given nature of language, but of human life itself. In his uses of the vernacular, both in theory and practice, he anticipates Dante by over a century. His treatment of soul and body should be read in the context of debates on the relative merits of Aristotle and Plato, which inspired diverse literary texts, such as Eustathios Makrembolites' erotic novel, *Hysmine and Hysminias*, and the anonymously transmitted satirical dialogue, *Timarion*. Such literary themes provided authors with the means to challenge Komnenian court values and practices quite sharply, both in high and low styles.<sup>36</sup> Closer attention to poems inserted into manuscripts by copyists such as Alphonsos the Athenian can only enhance our understanding of Byzantine contributions to the Renaissance.

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34 *BMFD* 3:880–86, and 946 n. 1.

35 See M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, 2nd rev. ed., P. Roilos and D. Yatromanolakis (Lanham, MD, 2002) 118–19, 229–30, n. 58, for a similar case of snatches from laments for exile copied into monastic manuscripts. I cannot resist a speculation that these poems may also have been known in song: that would explain the endurance of so many difficult words over some three centuries.

36 On the *Timarion*, see D. Krallis, "Harmless Satire, Stinging Critique: Notes and Suggestions for Reading the *Timarion*," in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium*, ed. D. Angelov and M. Saxby (Farnham and Burlington, 2013), 221–46. W. Hörandner, ed., *Theodoros Prodromos, historische Gedichte*, Wiener Studien 11 (Vienna, 1974), lists them under his second category, as "zweifelhaftes," no. 214.66–67.

☞ MY THANKS TO D.O. READERS FOR GENEROUS and meticulous advice, as also to Peter Mackridge and David Holton on linguistic and metrical matters, to Pat Easterling for her suggestions on manuscript questions, and to Chris Livanos for drawing my attention to Dellaportas's poem. This paper was circulated for discussion in March 2013 to Ruth Macrides' Byzantine graduate seminar (University of Birmingham), and formed the core of my inaugural lecture at the University of

Edinburgh as eighth A. G. Leventis Professor in Greek (October 2013). My thanks to all discussants, especially to A. Kotsonis for confirming the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman origins of Theodore Prodromos's figure, *Life* (Βίος), from A. B. Cook, *Zeus, a Study in Ancient Religion* (Cambridge, 1925), 2.2:860–73. Last but not least, I owe a huge debt to Philip Healey, for his patient computer assistance.